

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 07637 151529Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-20 /090 W
-----105134 151646Z /64

R 151222Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1610
AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMCONSUL MADRAS

UNCLAS NEW DELHI 7637

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PBOR IN BD
SUBJECT: ANOTHER INDO-BANGLADESH RIVER PROBLEM

1. ANOTHER INDO-BANGLADESH RIVER DISPUTE WAS RAISED IN THE RAJYA SABHA MAY 12. BIPINPAL DAS OF CONGRESS COMPLAINED THAT THREE SPURS ERECTED BY THE BDG IN THE KUSHIARA RIVER THREATENED SERIOUS EROSION TO KARIMGANJ TOWN IN ASSAM. IN HIS REPLY, FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE SAID THAT THE GOI WAS AWARE OF THE PROBLEM OF EROSION AND HAD MADE EFFORTS TO SEEK A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION BUT "UNFORTUNATELY," DESPITE HAVING RAISED THE ISSUE A NUMBER OF TIMES WITH THE BDG, IT HAD NOT YET FOUND A SOLUTION.

2. VAJPAYEE NOTED THAT THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY PASSED THROUGH THE MID-STREAM OF THE KUSHIARA AND EXPLAINED THAT BECAUSE OF THE MEANDERING NATURE OF THE RIVER, BOTH COUNTRIES HAD UNDERTAKEN SINCE 1956 THE CONSTRUCTION OF TIMBER SPURS ON THEIR RESPECTIVE BANKS OF THE RIVER WHICH HAD BEEN SUBJECT TO CLAIMS AND COUNTERCLAIMS REGARDING THEIR NECESSITY AND THEIR ADVERSE
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CONSEQUENCIES. WHEN THE GOI LEARNED IN JULY 1977 THAT TWO BOULDER SPURS WERE BEING CONSTRUCTED WHICH "STOOD ALMOST UPTO A THIRD OF THE RIVER", IT RECOMMENDED TO THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT THAT SIMILAR SPURS BE CONSTRUCTED ON THE INDIAN SIDE. (IT IS UNCLEAR, HOWEVER, FROM THE OFFICIAL AND PRESS REPORTS OF THE DEBATE WHETHER THESE SPURS WERE ACTUALLY CONSTRUCTED.)

VAJPAYEE GAVE THE CHRONOLOGY OF UNSUCCESSFUL CONSULTATIONS WITH THE BDG ON THE ISSUE AND SAID THAT IN THE GOI'S OPINION "THE ACTION ON SUCH MATTERS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN CONSULTATION WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE UNILATERAL ACTION COULD ONLY LEAD TO COUNTER-ACTION, THEREBY COMPLICATING THE PROBLEM RATHER THAN SOLVING IT." SUCH PROBLEMS WERE BEST SOLVED WITHIN THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK, SUCH AS THE JOINT RIVER COMMISSION AND ON THE BASIS OF JOINT STUDIES.

3. REPLYING TO CHARGES THAT THE BDG WAS "CLEVERLY AND CLANDESTINELY" TRYING TO SHIFT THE INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY TOWARD THE INDIAN SIDE, VAJPAYEE SAID THAT THE BDG CLAIMED THEY WERE TRYING TO SAVE THEIR AREA FROM EROSION BUT, HE ADDED, IF THE RESULT WAS A SHIFTING OF THE BOUNDARIES, THEN IT WAS A SERIOUS MATTER. THE GOI HAD BROUGHT THE BOUNDARY ISSUE TO THE ATTENTION OF THE BDG AND ALSO TOLD THE BDG THAT FURTHER CONSTRUCTION OF SPURS SHOULD STOP. AS FOR EFFORTS TO SAVE KARIMGANJ, VAJPAYEE INTIMATED THAT THE INDIANS HAD NOT ACTED PROMPTLY ENOUGH BUT WITH THE MONSOON APPROACHING THE PLANNING COMMISSION WAS PREPARED TO GIVE MONEY FROM THE CENTRE TO THE ASSAM GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO SAVE THE TOWN.

4. PRESS COVERAGE OF VAJPAYEE'S REMARKS STRESSED THAT UNCLASSIFIED

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THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAD THREATENED "COUNTER-ACTION", A BELLICOSE READING NOT BORNE OUT BY THE OFFICIAL SUMMARY OF THE PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS. GOHEEN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTE SETTLEMENT, NEGOTIATIONS, SOIL EROSION, BOUNDARY RIVERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 15 may 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978NEWDE07637
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780205-0542
Format: TEL
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780558/aaaabxls.tel
Line Count: 98
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bf821c9f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2689372
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ANOTHER INDO-BANGLADESH RIVER PROBLEM
TAGS: PBOR, SENV, IN, BD
To: STATE BOMBAY
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bf821c9f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014